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REMARKS

ON THE IMPORTANCE

OF OUR

COAST FISHERIES,

AS THE MEANS OF INCREASING THE AMOUNT OF FOOD
AND EMPLOYMENT FOR THE LABOURING
CLASSES, AND OF MAINTAINING
A NURSERY FOR SEAMEN.

(PUBLISHED FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE SHIPWRECKED FISHERMEN AND MARINERS'
BENEVOLENT SOCIETY.)

BY

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PREFACE.

THE object of the writer in making the present appeal may be explained in a few words. He feels a natural desire to diminish the sufferings of the poorer classes of the community, while his professional habits and experience would lead him to contemplate with peculiar interest, that mode of relief which the fisheries present to our numerous maritime population. As a naval man he desires the well being of his own profession, still it is not the prospect of professional advantage alone, but the regular and healthy employment of the labouring classes, and a competent supply of all their wants, that he has in view. He does not undertake to inform the public on a subject already too well known, the vast amount of actual distress in the country, but merely to remind them of the fact that such is the case, and of the extremely simple method of relief, so mercifully brought within our reach. Much he believes may be gained by a liberal effort to improve our coast fisheries, and it is this conviction, that an increase of food and an unfailing nursery for seamen must be the result, from the employment of otherwise idle and unproductive capital, that has induced him to endeavour to direct the public attention that way.

Elford House,

June 26th, 1843.

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ON THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR COAST FISHERIES.

WERE we to form our judgment of the actual situation of the British Empire from external appearances, we should say that it abounds in all that can contribute to the most complete state of general and individual prosperity. We are blessed by a kind Providence with every thing necessary for our subsistence, nay for our comforts, and even for our luxuries. We have a numerous, a healthy, and intelligent population, a fertile soil, and with few exceptions bountiful harvests. We have a sound constitution, mild and impartial laws, administered with the most inflexible justice, firmly securing the rights and property of every class of our fellow subjects. We have mines abounding in the most useful ores and minerals, and the country so universally intersected with roads, as to afford the ready

means of transporting the raw or manufactured produce to every part of the country, and particularly to our sea ports for exportation. We have numerous safe and capacious harbours, with fleets of shipping manned by hardy and enterprising seamen, ready to convey our commerce to every part of the world, or to defend their country. We have shores teeming with fish of the most nutritious description, with a maritime population peculiarly qualified for carrying on the most extensive and lucrative fishery at all times of the year; forming at the same time a nursery for our naval and merchant services.

We have in addition to all these advantages at home, the most extensive and productive colonies dispersed over the whole surface of the globe, ready to receive our manufactures, and to afford us the means of carrying on the most profitable commerce to every part of the world; to render us entirely independent of foreign nations, as well with regard to supplies, as for our exports.

It does appear most extraordinary that with all the elements of the most entire national prosperity, and in the enjoyment of profound and long continued peace, we should find so numerous a portion of our population sunk in misery and degradation to a degree hitherto unknown in this country. The causes to which this state of things may be attributed are numerous and obvious: the

most evident is the want of demand in the foreign markets for our manufactures, and the consequent want of employment for our labouring classes. But why rest our dependance upon foreigners, when we have such resources within ourselves? It was naturally to be expected that other nations would avail themselves of all the means placed in their power by a long peace, the general diffusion of knowledge, and the aid of machinery, to establish manufactures of their own, and of course to lessen the demand upon the industry of our countrymen. They have learned to supply themselves, and to work up their own raw materials, and this at a price much lower than we can afford to supply them. We must, therefore, seek for customers elsewhere, and other means for the productive employment of our immense capital: nor shall we fail to find them if we exert the full energy of our national character.

The difficulty of procuring food for our rapidly increasing population has become a subject of most awful importance, and is well worthy of the serious consideration of every member of the community. A variety of means have been suggested for increasing our supplies, and removing the state of suffering under which so many of our fellow subjects are groaning, but none have as yet appeared to meet the case. The abolition of the corn laws have been looked

to as the most efficacious plan, and the multitude have been taught to clamour for such a measure as the only mode of affording them relief. This experiment has been thoughtlessly but warmly advocated, but how little likely to produce the desired effect may be seen by the consequences of the mitigated tariff, which pressing severely upon our agricultural and even upon many branches of our manufacturing departments, appears to have failed in the great object of increasing the supplies of food. Were all restrictions removed from the importation of grain, we might enjoy a greater degree of abundance for a very short time, but it would be dearly paid for by the sacrifice of our independence, and even of our station, in the scale of nations ; we must soon descend from our present elevation, and cease to be a first-rate power, whatever might be the amount of our wealth or the extent of our territories. We are however by the divine blessing far removed from such a necessity ; we possess within ourselves the most abundant means of procuring whatever may be necessary, not only for our subsistence, but for our comfort. If we look only to our soil for our support we must be disappointed, fertile and productive as it is. Our cattle and corn will be found insufficient to meet the annual consumption, and the habit of depending upon them exclusively has often occasioned

severe distress ; while we seem to lose sight of a resource placed within our reach by a kind Providence, which united to the produce of our fields, offers at once independence and abundance, and at the same time contributes to the maintenance of our national strength. I allude to the means we possess on almost every part of our coast, of carrying on the most productive and profitable fisheries, and of conveying the cargoes of our fishing boats to every part of the interior, in so short a time and at so small a cost as to double the supply of food to the poorest of our labouring classes.

It is not by legislative measures that we can expect our burdens to be removed, but by diligently availing ourselves of the advantages we possess, and employing a portion of our capital in encouraging and supporting the industrious portions of our fellow subjects in their respective employments, that each may put his shoulder to the wheel, and make every effort to increase the stock of general subsistence, so that it may afford competence to all. Various are the ways in which idle hands and idle capital may be profitably employed, affording mutual assistance instead of ruinous competition.

No country in the world possesses greater advantages for carrying on the most profitable and abundant fishery than our own. Our rivers with

their estuaries and bays, nay the whole of our coasts abound with fish, and with safe and sheltered ports for our fishermen; and the whole country is so intersected with railroads, that their produce may be forwarded every where at a very small expense.

Few of our fellow subjects are now strangers to the sea coasts, for railroads and steam vessels have made travellers of all; and all must be struck with the multitudes of hardy inhabitants of our maritime counties, who make the sea their element; every village and every hamlet becoming nurseries for the unfailing supply of seamen for our navy, our natural and hitherto invincible defence, as well as for manning our merchant vessels. How important then is it to keep up such a source of supply, by every encouragement which the beneficence or the wealth of the nation can bestow.

Our ancestors were so well aware of the value of our fisheries as a source of supply, that the exportation of fish was prohibited until the resident population was supplied at a stipulated price, a prohibition which caused many of our fishermen to emigrate to Holland, and shewed the Dutch the value of the Scotch fisheries.

In the reign of Charles I. an association was founded for carrying on a general fishery in the three kingdoms, and every effort was made to

support them, by enjoining the strict observance of Lent, and by a remission of the salt duties to those engaged in the fisheries. On the Restoration of Charles II. a council of royal fishery was appointed, of which the Duke of York and Earl of Clarendon were members, with power to make laws for the management of the trade. Various efforts were made for the establishment of companies to carry on fisheries in the course of the eighteenth century, but they all failed, owing it is said to London (the dearest port in the world) being the head quarters of the fishery, or as it may be more correctly stated, owing to the superiority of our rivals the Dutch. An author of that day says,—“We fish intolerably dear, and the Dutch exceedingly cheap.”—*Ency. article Fish.*

Great efforts have been made from time to time to promote the success of our fisheries by means of bounties, but this only led to idleness and perjury: vessels were fitted out, for the purpose of catching the bounty and not the fish. The bounties were therefore reduced, and at length finally repealed; nor was any injury inflicted upon the fisheries by withdrawing these bounties, as will appear by a reference to the table of produce, made upon an average of the five years immediately preceding the repeal of the bounty, and the five years following this act.

The result was as follows :—

BEFORE.	AFTER.
349,488 barrels Herring Cured.	396,910 Cured.
224,370 Exported.	222,848 Exported.

The impolicy of the bounty system was further shewn by the evidence of Mr. Ternan, of Liverpool, which is to the following effect :—“The fishermen in that part of the country are mostly inhabitants of a village called Skerries, where the houses are neater and in better repair now than they were in the time of the bounties ; and the men themselves better clothed, better fed, more industrious, and more temperate than they were during the bounty. Nothing was more calculated to demoralize them than the bounties, as they were given ; nothing could be more mischievous or more injudicious than the tonnage system ; it was in fact a bounty upon idleness and perjury. Their increased prosperity has arisen from their astonishingly increased industry, and the greater reliance on their own exertions without looking to extraneous aid. In Scotland the fishermen have been able, from the profits of the business since the removal of the bounties, to replace the small boats they formerly used by boats of larger dimensions, and provide themselves with fishing materials of greater value.”—*Ency. art. Fisheries.*

We gladly avail ourselves of some admirable observations we have met with from time to time

in the Quarterly Review on the subject of fisheries, and shall make some very copious extracts from them. Indeed the object of these pages is rather to remind than to inform, they are written less with a view of offering any thing new, than to bring together in one point of view, for public notice, what has been occasionally stated by authors of acknowledged talent and information, dispersed in various publications, and lost sight of from being mixed up with other subjects. This will be our apology for the lengthened extracts we propose to make.

The Quarterly Review adverting to the distress of the working classes, says, "This is a bad state of things, and in looking for a remedy we naturally turn first to the Ocean which embraces our isles ; there indeed is a harvest ripe for the gathering at every time of the year, without the labour of tillage, without the expense of seed and manure, without the payment of rent and taxes. Every acre of the sea is far more productive of wholesome, palatable, and nutritious food than the same quantity of the richest land ; they are fields which require only the labourer's willing hand to reap that never-failing crop which the bounty of Providence has kindly bestowed. Had it not been sanctioned by actual experiment, it would have been considered as fabulous to assign to the female cod from three to four millions of

eggs." So said we in the *Quarterly Review*, vol. IX, p. 266, four and twenty years ago; "but our statements have seldom, we believe, been found extravagant, and in this case the result of subsequent experiments is, that *nine* millions of ova are comprised occasionally in one cod fish."

Nor is it from the deep alone that this plentiful harvest may be secured. "The law of nature" says Mr. Farrell, "which obliges mackerel and many others to visit the shallow water of the shores at a particular season, appears to be one of those wise and beautiful provisions of the Creator by which not only is the species perpetuated with the greater certainty, but a large portion of the parent animals are thus brought within the reach of man, who, but for the action of this law, would be deprived of many of those species most valuable to him for food. For the mackerel, dispersed over the immense surface of the deep, no effective fishery could be carried on; but approaching the shore as they do, in great numbers, and roving along the coast in immense shoals, millions are caught, which yet form but a very small portion of the myriads that escape."

"The harvest then is every where ready, but where are the labourers to gather it in? It is with us an old subject of lamentation that the Celtic tribes still retain those prejudices against fish and fishing which almost characterised the

ancient Grecian : and true it is that they cannot be early made deep sea fishers ; but the difficulty though great, is far from an impossibility, and we hope the time will yet arrive when the Irish peasant will diligently search for treasure where he will be sure to find it. But we shall look in vain for this desirable change of character, to any great extent at least, till there is such a steady demand for the article as will ensure a constant and lucrative employment for the poor, and a satisfactory return for the investment of capital by the rich. Now fish, with the exception of some of more common kinds, such as sprats, herrings, and mackerel, is looked upon by all classes at present as a luxury and not as a necessary of life, as it once was. In some of our inland counties the peasantry know not the taste of fresh sea fish, their ideas upon the subject being for the most part limited to the flavour of a red herring."

"The Dutch when first emerged out of their mud banks far exceeded in their fisheries the greatest efforts this country has yet made in the height of its prosperity ; and even now, (1815,) after years of unparalleled oppression, one hundred and ten herring busses, says their secretary of state, have sailed this season for the great fishery, the source of Dutch prosperity."

"Want of example, of encouragement, of capi-

tal, and skill, have hitherto retarded the progress of the fisheries: yet we should think that a small portion of each would be sufficient to ensure the success of an object, which in every point of view is of such national importance. While it increased the public wealth, it would add most abundantly to the stock of subsistence, and train up a body of hardy seamen. It would at once give employment on their own element to the 75,000 seamen and marines who have been, and half as many more who are about to be, discharged from the navy, many of whom must either seek employment in foreign countries, or become a burthen upon their own.”—*vol. XII. p. 414.*

“It is really disgraceful to this maritime nation that, surrounded as the British Islands are with fish of the most nutritive and wholesome descriptions, swarming on banks of many leagues in extent, each acre of which is far more productive of food than the richest acre of land, the article of fish should nevertheless be a luxury, in all the great cities and towns of the empire, confined to the upper ranks of society. It has been proved by direct and positive facts that, with a due portion of encouragement, the finest mackerel and herrings may be sold in London, and millions of them have actually been so sold, with a reasonable profit, at a penny a piece; instead of which the usual price is from 8d. to 18d. Such indeed

is the productive nature of the fisheries, and so very easy would it be to render them a source of nutritious food for general consumption, not only in the maritime towns, but in all the inland districts of Great Britain and Ireland, that an adequate supply might be and has been furnished at 2d. a pound, or about £17 a ton, when the price of butcher's meat was £70 a ton. This difference in the price is more than sufficient to purchase the accompaniments of potatoes and butter, which would reconcile the mass of the people to the use of fish, and afford them a better and more relishing meal than a scanty portion of butcher's meat and bread."—*Quart. Rev. vol. XII. p. 413.*

The monopoly which has hitherto existed in the sale of fish, is the chief or it may be said the only cause of its scarcity. The establishment of a second market in the metropolis has done but little towards the remedy of this evil: it has but extended the number of monopolists, and in some measure increased the destruction of fish brought up the Thames. A more general competition must be created by means of additional capital, and as the demand increases a sale will readily be found for what is now kept back and destroyed. Mr. Colquhoun says "it is lamentable that while £45,000,000 sterling is estimated as the value of butcher's meat and other animal food consumed annually, the property created by the labour em-

ployed in the coast and river fisheries can only be estimated at £1,500,000, including herrings and pilchards exported."

It is our wish to state candidly all the objections we have met with to the cultivation of our fisheries and to endeavour to meet them by facts and references. Amongst others we find the following passage in the Quarterly Review extracted from the Times newspaper of the 15th October, 1841. "There is a general complaint prevalent in London and its environs that fish is not so plentiful, and consequently not so cheap as it was wont to be some two or three years since, although no reason can be assigned for the cause of this falling off, nevertheless the circumstance will admit of an explanation. There are many persons who are in the habit of buying up large stocks of fish at Billingsgate daily, and of exporting them into the interior of the country where they meet with a ready and advantageous sale. The expedient is greatly facilitated by means of railway conveyance, and vans may be seen in regular attendance at the gate waiting to take the supplies of fish which are promptly dispatched by the various trains to the more central towns and districts of England. This circumstance tends to affect the poor industrious market women who are in the habit of hawking their wares about the different parts of the metropolis and its suburbs for sale."

The Quarterly Review makes the following just remark upon this passage. "We are sorry for the poor hawkers of London, but still it is to the railroads we must look for carrying a taste for fish into the central counties, and thus assisting to create that steady demand which will in our opinion produce a constant and adequate supply and restore fish to the regular place on English tables which it once occupied, neither are we to forget that railroads may bring fish up, as well as carry fish down. And in truth we believe there would be no want of fish on the Londoner's board if the supply of the metropolis were but fairly used."—*Quart. Rev. No. 137. p. 232.*

The fact is, as stated in the Quarterly Review, "that the bulk of fish sent to this great town is so consigned that it gets into comparatively few hands, or that the dealers place their own value upon the article, regulating the supply of cod, &c. from the well boats and store boats lying near Gravesend and feeding the market with the stock there accumulated to the profitable point, taking care that there shall never be such a glut as to lower the price desirable for the dealer." *p. 232.*

Were the whole amount of fish caught by the Thames fishermen as well as those taken by our boats in the North Seas, fairly brought to market, there would be no want of a supply, and in that case so far from the hawkers of London being

injured in their trade, they would be greatly benefitted, by finding the article becoming an object of increasing and universal consumption ; one of the necessaries of life, instead of a luxury, as it is now considered.

The Review continues,—“A searching investigation as to the state of the fish markets, with their apparatus of middlemen, or fish salesmen, &c. &c. and the practices of fishmongers, would disclose curious facts. Some tricks of the trade are shewn up in the article above referred to, (*vol. XI. p. 277,*) their unpunishable tricks by which the public are robbed and starved in the midst of plenty, whilst a hungry boy is sent to prison for stealing a loaf. Let any member of parliament move for an accurate return of the quantity of fish thrown into the Thames at Billingsgate, if he can get it, by way of a beginning.”

“Why should there be any restriction at all ? what would be thought of a set of laws to prohibit graziers and market gardeners in the sale of their produce, or to control the wholesale grocers and cheesemongers in the disposition of their goods ? Look at the last census : hear the cry of the multitude for food. These are not times to abuse God’s gifts. If there must be a law to fetter the diffusion of what might again be considered a general necessary of life, let them not be such as those under which our municipal

authorities raise a hue and cry against the sale of bad fish, *whilst the monopoly which keeps it up till it is bad, is tolerated.*”

We have witnessed with great delight the arrival of the fishing boats with their cargoes, at Hastings, Brighton, and other places on the south coast, and been much amused at the nature of the auction for disposing of the fish. If we were to form our judgment of the estimation in which such food is held by the working classes, from the crowds which attend the delivery of the boats, we should say there was no want of demand, and that had the number of boats been greatly increased there would have been profitable employment for the whole, especially were the surrounding villages and country places habitually supplied with fish; even the refuse gurnets and hakes and other coarse fish were readily disposed of.

We abound in all that can give encouragement and stimulus to enterprise and industry. We have capital, skill, energy, and patriotism, which if duly brought into action, must be productive of every thing which can contribute to national and individual prosperity; would give employment to all our idle and starving multitudes. Here would be no danger of the energies of our labouring classes being rendered useless by the

introduction of machinery :* on the contrary the power of steam itself might create an additional demand for labour, by sending the smaller vessels, such as the steam tugs, to the dogger and other banks, carrying supplies of provisions and relief of labour to the fishing vessels, and receiving the fish as fast as they were taken, and bringing them without delay to market, free from all restrictions. The fish hawkers would then find enough to do in taking their stock to the different railway stations, as well as supplying the wide extent of our gigantic metropolis with an article of universal demand.

Were the means of conveyance in immediate readiness to distribute the produce of our fishing

* There are cases in which machinery may be made eminently useful in assisting the poor labourer, and we cannot help wondering that it should not have been applied to this purpose, under the progress of scientific mechanism which has taken place. We allude to the lateral conveyance of ores, and particularly of coals, in the mines, which are brought to the mouth of the pit through passages so low, that only very young children can be employed in transporting them, and then by crawling on their hands and knees, to the destruction of their health and growth. It would appear that by having leading blocks fixed in a central situation at the mouth of the pit, ropes might be led into all the ramifications of the mine, and then worked by steam, save an immense amount of youthful human labour.

boats throughout the neighbouring districts, ensuring them a speedy sale, and at such rates as to enable every labourer, at whatever rate of wages, to make it an article of daily food, there would soon be a wonderful change in our coast scenery. The greatest activity would immediately prevail, and the manufacture of every thing connected with fisheries be in increased demand. There would be no longer want of employment for children, or the necessity of sending them to the manufacturing towns in search of bread, to be earned by the sacrifice of health and morals, and I may add of liberty, for what state of slavery can be compared to that endured by such numbers of children in our mines and factories? Let those who have witnessed the activity of the children on the sea beach at Deal and Yarmouth, as well as innumerable other places, when a heavy surf is breaking on the shore,—their healthful appearance and joyful energies as the boats are landing, vying with each other who should be most daring in rushing through the breakers to save the materials occasionally washed out of the boats. Let them contrast the situation of these children with those shut up in the bowels of the earth, in dark, damp and unwholesome mines, or equally unwholesome manufactories; see the former in their sunny and cheerful villages, with abundance of food, and then turn their eyes to

the squalid misery of crowded wretched hovels in our manufacturing districts, sunk in filth and every species of human degradation. Let these classes be contrasted with each other, and there can be but one opinion as to the expediency of paying greater attention to the advantages our maritime position offers us. Every motive seems to urge us to exertion ; doubling the amount of food and affording the most healthy and constant employment to a large portion of the community.

To refute the objection of a supposed dislike of a fish diet amongst the working classes, we would refer to the fact of the very large and general use of this article on every part of the coast, and appeal to all who may have the opportunity of judging for themselves, as to the robust health and frame of the inhabitants,—nay, were we to be called upon to say in what part of the world we have remarked the greatest degree of physical perfection, we should readily answer, on the sea coasts, not only of our own country and those of our colonies, but on the shores of France, Spain, and Italy ; and we should especially mention the inhabitants of the northern shores of Europe.

The inhabitants of Newfoundland and Nova Scotia for many years had little other food than fish (salted in winter) with potatoes, grown every where amidst patches of rocks, without much

labour, or enclosure. Butter was seldom or ever used by the working classes: fish, fried with a very small quantity of salt pork, afforded them a relishing and nourishing diet. The growth of the potato, we all know, may be increased to any amount in any part of our islands; witness the flourishing potato grounds in the neighbourhood of almost all our turnpikes, taken in general from the road.

One reason of the disinclination of the poor of the interior counties to the use of fish is, that they so seldom see it; for when exposed to sale in the country, it is either so high in price as to be beyond their means, or so high in odour as to be disgusting to them. But were there a regular supply in the country markets of fresh fish, at a moderate price, the taste for it would soon be acquired, and there is no doubt that the additional quantity of food thus supplied would be attended with increased health and strength, and a most evident decrease in the amount of poor's rates, as well as the number of candidates for the unions. It cannot be doubted that by far the greater part of disease among the poor, originates from scanty food, and the excitement of ardent spirits, had recourse to, to supply the deficiency.

As a farther proof that the consumption of fish would greatly increase in proportion as it becomes plentiful in the interior, we make the

following extract from the Manchester Guardian of the 2nd February, 1842.

“CHEAP FISH.—The Flamborough Head and Filey Bay Fishery Company have opened a shop on the Old Quay Company’s ground, on the Salford side of the Victoria bridge, for the sale of fish caught off the Yorkshire coast, at such a price as makes it an article in great demand amongst our poorer classes. We are told that the fish is caught in the afternoon of one day, and is sold here before it has been twenty-four hours out of the water. It is conveyed from Flamborough, Filey, &c. in carts to Hull, a distance of thirty-six miles, and reaches that town in time to be forwarded by railway at six o’clock the following morning, via Selby and Leeds to Manchester, reaching here about noon. Sometimes in boisterous and foggy weather the carts cannot leave Flamborough till too late for the early train, which reaches here about two o’clock. The Company’s shop was opened for the first time on Saturday last, at about three o’clock in the afternoon, with a supply of nineteen baskets containing each 12 stones (of 14lbs.) of fish, being altogether 228 stones weight, or 3192 lbs. of fish. The price at which the fish was sold was 2s. per stone, not quite 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. per pound; and this price required but little announcement to make the poorer classes flock to the shop in such

numbers as completely to obstruct for a time the footpath of the bridge ; and such was the throng and the demand that the whole 3192 lbs. weight were disposed of in an hour and three quarters, and it became necessary to shut up the shop as the most effectual way of getting rid of disappointed applicants. On Monday morning the supply was not large, consisting only of eight baskets of 12 stones each, 96 stones. The shop was opened for the sale of this supply at ten o'clock in the morning, and it was all disposed of in an hour and a quarter, and then the shop was closed for the remainder of the day. There is no fishing on Sundays, so that the Monday's supply consists of fish caught on Saturday afternoon. On Tuesday the supply of fish is rather later in reaching Manchester, as the boats do not go out till Monday morning, and are later in the day in catching the fish. Yesterday the supply reached this town at two o'clock. It consisted of 192 stones, or 2688 lbs. and was all sold in less than three hours ; the shop being opened shortly after three o'clock. With the view of preventing the obstruction to the footpath, the purchasers were admitted into the yard or ground and then entered an open sale room behind the shop. Yesterday morning there were several scores of women with baskets, waiting the opening of the shop, as early as nine and ten o'clock,

though repeatedly assured that it would not be opened before two o'clock. The fish now supplied consists of codling, haddock, plaice, and skate. The cod is of very fine quality, and is said to fetch a penny a pound more in any competing sale than that caught on the western coast. The fish generally is quite fresh and wholesome, and affords very cheap food to many poor families."

We would particularly advert to the manner in which the inhabitants of Norway, the coasts of Sweden, and Finland are supplied with food by means of their fishermen, how little they derive from the land, and how robust and healthy the population of those countries is known to be.

France, upon the return of peace, and consequent restoration of her colonies, saw at once the importance of straining every nerve to restore her merchant marine, and to cultivate her fisheries;—witness her exertions, her continued and increasing exertions to this day for these purposes; the numbers of boats out of every port in the channel, and especially from Boulogne, Calais, and other ports the nearest to our shores, and the efforts they make to sustain a successful competition with our fishermen, intruding into our markets, and acquiring such a knowledge of our coasts and harbours as may at some future period be very injurious to our interests, unless

met with a corresponding energy on our part.

A committee of the House of Commons was appointed in 1833, to inquire into the state of the fisheries in Great Britain and Ireland, in consequence of the distressed situation of the channel fisheries. The Committee found them in a very lamentable and depressed state, that they had been gradually sinking since the peace in 1815, and "that the capital employed did not yield a profitable return: that the number of vessels and men to whom it gave employment were diminished, and that the fishermen who formerly could maintain themselves and their families by their industry, were in a greater or less degree pauperized."

"The cause of this unfavourable change, to which, as being in its opinion the most readily susceptible of remedy, the committee gave its principal attendance, was the interference of France and Holland; but the principal cause of the distress was stated to be the scarcity of all fish which bred in the channel, compared with what it was 15, or 20 years ago, operating prejudicially to the fishermen, at the same time that a continued fall in prices had taken place in the markets. This fall of prices could not have occurred, in consequence of the scarcity in the supply. That there was a diminished quantity taken by the English fishermen, may possibly

have been true, but considering that the supply in our markets was actually increased, so as to provide our groaning population at progressively decreasing prices, we can only account for it, by the facts adduced by the committee, by supposing that the foreign fishermen, of whose interference grievous complaints where made, were better skilled, and more persevering in their calling, than our countrymen, a supposition which seems to be borne out by the circumstance of our having, since the report was delivered, been still more abundantly supplied with fish for our tables, while the cry of distress on the part of our fishermen has passed away, doubtless owing to the greater degree of skill and industry which have been since exerted." *Encyclo.*

"A complaint, the opposite to that brought forward by the committee, has of late been preferred against our fishermen, by the owners of the boats, who allege, that having advanced all the capital necessary for the undertaking, and having probably also contributed to the support of the men during the dead season, under the faith of an agreement, to receive at stipulated prices, all the produce of the nets, the men so bound to them, sell a considerable part of the fish which they take, to boats dispatched from the coast of France. These circumstances have been mentioned, because a great, and it is thought a

groundless impression was created by the result of the inquiry in 1833, which inquiry, it has been alleged, was undertaken to satisfy the desires of certain interested parties, who wished to make out a case for the interference of government." *Encyclo.*

The committee appointed to enquire into the causes of distress alleged to exist in our channel fisheries, and which had been increasing from the termination of the war in 1815, found upon diligent enquiry, that they might be classed under the following heads :—

- 1 The interference of French fishermen.
- 2 The quantity of foreign fish sold in London.
- 3 The decrease and scarcity of fish in the channel.

As to the first of these points, it appeared upon evidence that for a long time past, large fleets of fishermen from Calais, Boulogne, and Dieppe, &c. had been accustomed to work off the Kent and Sussex coasts, often within half a league of the shore, and occasionally much nearer, and in the bays and shallow waters, in which it is particularly necessary for the preservation of the brood of fish, that such as frequent these waters during the breeding season should not be disturbed, nor their young destroyed. It appeared that the French fishing vessels had greatly increased since the peace ; there being at

the date of the report 300 sailing out of Boulogne alone, and that they were more numerous and of a larger tonnage, than those *employed by our own countrymen upon that coast*, being generally manned with double or treble the men, and furnished with nets and fishing gear superior to those of our own people. In consequence of this superiority on the part of the French, it was averred that the English fishermen coming in constant competition with these rivals, had sustained so great injury and such frequent loss and damage of their nets, &c. especially in the herring and mackerel seasons, that they had not been able to earn a livelihood as they used to do by their trade, but had in some instances been wholly ruined, and had withdrawn altogether from the occupation, whilst the French fishermen continuing upon our coasts, and sometimes not returning to their own ports during the whole period of the seasons last mentioned, made a constant practice of selling their fish at sea, and shipping them into carrier boats coming from the Thames and other parts, and into others which met them in the bay of Dover and elsewhere on the coast for the supply of the London market. But this was not all, for it was proved to the committee, that in other seasons, during which the French were fishing with hooks and lines for turbot and other sea fish in the chan-

nel, they were accustomed to come in great numbers every morning from Boulogne and other places into the English bays before they began fishing, and then drag with nets for baits in the shallow waters close upon the shore, destroying an immense quantity of the young and unsizeable fish, and this at periods of the year when the French *are not permitted to fish in the bays upon their own coasts*, and when our fishermen leave their breeding grounds as much undisturbed as possible."

"The committee observe that this last mentioned practice caused great injury, as tending to diminish the quantity of fish upon our coasts, and that while these proceedings were taking place upon one side of the channel, the fishermen of England were not allowed to fish within three leagues of the French coasts, but on approaching that limit were warned off. Nor do the committee forget the attention paid by the French government to the encouragement and extention of their channel fisheries as a nursery for seamen, in which view they require for each fishing vessel from eighteen to twenty men ; bounties being also granted in aid of all their fisheries."

"With regard to the second grievance, the committee strongly condemn the importation of foreign caught fish, as extremely injurious to the English fishermen, not only by preventing such

of them as live at a distance from London, from sending their fish, as they used to do, to the London markets, but also by inducing the French fishermen to remain upon the English coasts, and thereby to create a destructive competition as applicable to the coasts of Kent and Sussex. The committee express their surprise, at finding that notwithstanding the prohibitions of so many statutes, a very large illegal importation of foreign caught fish did in fact take place. It had been proved that one third of the fish supplied to the London market, was procured from foreigners, but this estimate included turbot, eels, and lobsters, which might be legally imported."

"The scarcity of fish in the channel is the third complaint, and the committee declare it to be satisfactorily proved, that the scarcity has been occasioned by the great destruction of the spawn and brood of fish, consequent on the non-observance of the laws, which at present exist for their preservation, and by which the fishing with ground or drag nets, within a certain distance of the shore, during particular seasons, or at all seasons of the year, with draught or floating nets, having the most of the nets under certain dimensions, has been declared unlawful. The committee state their opinion, that these statutes should be revised, and that a bill repealing such of the provisions as do not relate exclu-

sively to the coasts of Devon and Cornwall, and enacting others in lieu of them, with better remedies, for their observance, should be introduced into the next session of parliament."

"A fourth alleged mischief was the *stow-boat* fishing, or catching of sprats for manure, prevailing upon the Kentish, Norfolk, and Essex coasts. The nets are described as so small as not to let a pen pass through them, enclosing not only sprats but the spawn and young brood of all other kinds of fish; and as their nets are frequently drawn along the ground and in the shallow waters during the breeding season, and in the winter months before the young fish are gone into deeper waters, an immense destruction of the brood of fish is the inevitable consequence, while from the almost unlimited demand for this species of manure for land, and there being a ready sale for all that can be procured, this branch of fishing has greatly increased, and there are at present from 400 to 500 boats engaged in *stow boating* on the Kentish coast only, which remain upon the fishing grounds frequently for a week together, not for the purpose of catching sprats or any other fish to be sold as food in the market, but until they have obtained full cargoes of dead fish for the purpose of manuring the land."

"The committee say they were inclined to question whether this fishery (which is not of long

standing,) ought not to be entirely prevented, but upon the best consideration which they have been able to give the subject, they recommend that at least it should not be permitted to be carried on with ground or drag nets between the first of April and the last of November, nor with drift or floating nets in the bays during the breeding season, viz. from the first of May to the last of August, within a league of low water mark, or in less than ten fathoms water ; nor at any other time with nets of so small a mesh as is now generally used."

We have quoted the whole of this report from the pages of the Quarterly Review, in order to shew the importance of our fisheries, and the obstacles which have impeded the full measure of success. The only steps taken by government in consequence of this report, have been confined to restrictions upon foreign fishermen, a representation having been made to the French king upon the subject, which has led to an amicable arrangement ; but much still remains to be done at home.

We gladly continue our quotations from the Quarterly, as they hold out hopes of better times to this most valuable and deeply interesting portion of our industrious fellow subjects.

"Of late there have been symptoms of a smarter appearance about the fishing boats of

our southern counties. There we may now see sometimes a fleet of trim lug-rigged boats making for the white-cliffed picturesque coast,—not square, heavy, lumbering tubs like the generality of luggers (fishing boats), but beautifully raking at the stern, well found and shapely, sailing like witches. If you see one with a brilliant bit of red bunting fluttering merrily, there is meaning in the signal. “He has got turbot,” exclaims an ancient triton, lounging on the shore with a glass as weather beaten as himself,—“His wife will give him a cabbage to night,” meaning thereby not the mere vegetable, but an abundance of savoury flesh meat accompaniments besides. But mystery is observed after the windlasses have hove them up high and dry. No one will shew his cargo till chaps arrive. Down at length they come, and the glittering spoil is displayed. What groups of men, women and children, boats, horses, dogs, and fish; what studies for Stanfield. Depend upon it if we can but get the steady demand, we shall soon match our rivals. Here is the great object we have in view. It is to create this steady demand that we are so anxious that the inhabitants of the interior of our island should learn how abundantly they may be supplied with a most excellent and nutritious diet, and at the cheapest rate; that however bountifully their fields may produce a return for their labour, that their sea coasts

may be made equally productive, and that food in the greatest abundance has been amply provided for the utmost possible extent of increasing population, if sought for with the energy so peculiarly characteristic of our countrymen."

Having largely drawn upon the sources of information set before us in the *Quarterly Review*, we would refer to every page of that most useful and interesting article,—there are indeed many others dispersed through the different volumes, all equally valuable and animating. I would particularly advert to the sound and judicious observations upon the subject of "An enquiry into the principles upon which the embarkation of capital and the subsistence of fishermen might be made comparatively secure, opening a wide field into which it is our intention to enter by and by. At present our object, we confess, is primarily limited to the awakening of all the ichthyophagist in the appetites of men, so as to ensure that steady demand which we repeat must be the key-stone of the structure, although the diet is said to be so favourable to the increase of population." *Q. R. p. 239, Vol. LIX.*

It is gratifying to observe as we come down to a later period, that there has been a gradual increase in the number of boats, fishermen, coopers, and curers, from the year 1831 to 1838. This has been steadily progressive, the increase being as follows:—

	Boats.	Men.	Coopers, &c.	Total.
1832	11,059	49,164	31,402	80,566
1837	11,494	51,907	34,026	86,533
Increase,	435	2,743	2,624	5,167

The pilchard fishery employs about 1,000 boats, 3,500 men at sea, 5,000 men and women on shore. The average of the annual exports may amount to 30,000 hogsheads. They were larger, but the diminution is attributed to the circumstance of Lent being less strictly kept up in popish countries than formerly.

The herring fishery, chiefly carried on at Yarmouth, Lowestoff, Hastings, Folkstone, Cardigan Bay, and Swansea, in England and Wales; coasts of Caithness, Sunderland, Aberdeenshire, Banffshire, Morayshire, and Rosshire, in Scotland; and Galway, Killibegs, on the coast of Donegal, Mayo, the estuary of the Shannon, the coast between Dingle Bay and Kenmare, Bantry Bay, Waterford, and from Mizen Head to Cahore Point on the Wicklow coast, Ireland.

Years.	Boats.	Men.	Bar. of Herring.		Cwt. of other Fish	
			Cured.	Exportd.	Cured.	Exportd.
1821	7655	36159	9726	400	22689	434
1822	9304	44892	12258	1589	28314	72
1823	10309	49448	27857	4511	31424	197
1824	10882	52482	41633	1693	24886	269
1825	10823	57809	41376	209	34833	
1826	12025	58044	26698		33821	
1827	12124	59321	15784	683	40807	690
1828	12611	63421	13513		39750	
1829	13119	64771	16855	18	60380	185

From the foregoing table it appears that there was a very large and steady increase in the herring fishery from the year 1821, to 1829.

Having endeavoured to point out the resources we possess within ourselves, with respect to the productions of our coasts, we are naturally led to consider the means we possess of deriving the utmost advantage from them ; and surely, with such a population as that of our maritime counties, we can have no doubt of their exertions being completely successful, if encouraged by only a small portion of that capital now locked up worse than useless. We have said, that it is not to legislative measures that we must look for the removal of our difficulties, but to public and individual exertions. The fostering care however of government, cautiously and prudently administered, would go very far in rousing the energies of our coast fishermen, and might contribute greatly towards their success: a small sum of money advanced to individuals on fair security and at moderate interest, under the sanction of corporate bodies or other respectable parties ; encouragement to discharged seamen and marines, by converting many of the refuse stores in our dockyards into gear for fishing boats, and even in building boats for them when other work may not present itself for our artificers, instead of discharging them from the service, and compelling them to carry their skill and industry to

foreigners, and it may be to enemies. These boats might be distributed amongst men who had been discharged from the navy from length of service and good character, and payment made by very gradual annual instalments. The insurance on the boat being made one of the conditions of the grant.

It will here be objected, that government in becoming boat builders, will enter into competition with individuals of this craft, which may be ruinous to them, and cause distress on one hand while it attempts to relieve it on the other. But it is to be considered that this indulgence is only sought for those who have earned it by faithful services, and that the boat thus furnished will in all probability be employed on various parts of the coast, where its necessary repairs will furnish much additional employment to the workmen in that line. Why is it that we see so much distress amongst seamen? Thoughtlessness and improvidence is, it is true, a part of the seaman's character, but this arises in a great measure from the want of employment. Many might combine to get a boat and engage in fisheries, were it in their power to procure one without the outlay of a sum beyond their means. It might indeed be a very salutary regulation, that the head of such a party should have gained a certificate of particular good conduct; and were

this indulgence granted even in one thousand instances, the expense would scarcely be felt, the materials being supplied by conversion of stores already in hand ; many of them, such as canvas and rope, being of a perishable nature, decreasing in value every day. Those who attend the sale of condemned stores in our dockyards can say how immense must be the loss to government upon these occasions, and how enormous the gain to the fortunate purchasers, many of the materials being worked up again, and sold for new articles. Here again there may be an outcry made, and a charge brought against government that it is about to swamp the fisheries, by increasing the number of fishermen beyond the demand for their labour ; the increase however would be gradual, and only as called for by new markets opening in the interior of the country. The last return we have seen is that of 1837, when there were 11,494 boats employed, and 86,533 people, including coopers and curers. The addition of 1,000 boats and 8,000 people would not be felt when distributed throughout the whole of the extensive coasts of Great Britain and Ireland, whilst the employment of these 8,000 persons would be of immense benefit to our population, as well as a source of great encouragement to our seamen in general. But above all it would be of the utmost importance

to create a steady demand from the interior, and a ready mode of quick conveyance from the coast to the inland market. Here an appeal must lay to the public in general, but to the upper and middle classes in particular. Every possible exertion should be made to create a demand for fish, and every facility given for its importation at the lowest possible remunerating price. The extract we have given from the Manchester paper shows how readily this may be done.

Subscriptions for this purpose might be easily collected in every town, and meetings held, which if not immediately successful, would infallibly become so in the course of a short time, as food increased and distress diminished. Let the attempt be first made within thirty miles of the coasts, and particularly in those parts through or by which the railroads run: as soon as fish becomes habitually used in those places, the demand will rapidly increase in their respective neighbourhoods, and gradually be made from every part of the empire. In endeavouring to establish such a mode of supply we must look to the disinterested exertions of respectable persons, whose object is not personal advantage, but a sincere desire to promote the welfare of their poorer fellow subjects. Let us vie with each other in the inland towns and villages, in our efforts to obtain such a stream of abundance.

There can be no danger of failure, as no capital will be required more than a moderate sum *given* in the first instance as a charitable donation, from which no return is expected, beyond administering to the wants of the poor. A blessing will surely attend such an undertaking, and a few months, nay weeks, of patient perseverance will insure complete success.

A most important step has been recently taken which will tend greatly to the encouragement of our maritime population, by the establishment of a Society for the Relief of Shipwrecked Mariners and Fishermen. It was suggested to the benevolent mind of Mr. John Rye, a gentleman long known at Bath for his active exertions in every charitable institution. It was warmly taken up by Admiral the Rt. Hon. Sir George Cockburn, and nobly and almost universally responded to in the principal cities and towns throughout the three kingdoms, every exertion has been made for the formation of agencies on every part of the coast. Numerous as are our charitable institutions, and deservedly praised for the integrity and energy of their management, we may safely say there is none more laudable than that of the Shipwrecked Mariners and Fishermen. Their committee is truly a working committee, composed of men of business and talent, who give themselves up to its details with the most indefatigable diligence. Their

efforts have, in the course of three years, been crowned with complete success. They can now boast of the patronage of Her Most Gracious Majesty, of Her Majesty the Queen Dowager, Their Royal Highnesses Prince Albert, the Duke of Cambridge, and many of the Nobility and Gentry, with a very long list of subscribers from all other classes.

From its first establishment in May, 1839, to March, 1842, it has given relief to

279 Widows.

1034 Children.

160 Aged Parents.

2627 Shipwrecked persons.

408 Fishermen, heads of families left destitute.

The annual subscriptions being very small, are more likely to be productive, amounting to two shillings and six pence only for each subscriber, which is easily collected in any part of the kingdom, and being paid into the country banks, are remitted quarterly to the treasurer in London. In addition to the annual subscriptions, very large donations have been contributed, and the institution is rapidly growing into the importance it deserves, and is ready to offer the most liberal and immediate relief to any part of the coast when a calamity may occur.

It were needless to dwell upon the immense importance of such an institution, or upon the

stimulus which it must give to our maritime population. We have already shewn its beneficent results in the number of widows, orphans, aged parents, and other distressed persons to whom it has afforded timely relief. Let us remember that the sufferings of these people have all arisen from the dangerous occupations in which they are engaged for the public benefit,—that their calamities have been occasioned by their exposure to the fearful tempests which have so recently visited our coasts, whilst the great mass of their fellow subjects have been enjoying an entire exemption from these evils. The dangers to which the sea-faring portion of our community is exposed, are but little known in the interior of the country, where so many advantages are derived from their labour; but should the supply of fish increase so much as to make it an additional article of common food with the middle and working classes, there is no doubt but their enterprising exertions will be duly appreciated, and that the contributions for their encouragement will be nearly universal: that while markets are opened in every direction for the produce of their industry, a fund will be accumulated to supply their occasional but unavoidable losses.

The succour which has been so timely afforded has often gone far beyond the alleviation of temporary distress. It has in some instances enabled

the son to take the place of his father, who has perished on the coast, and to become the support of his widowed mother, and helpless family. It has enabled the widow to pay the rent of her cottage, and by her own exertions to preserve her children from being inmates of the work-house, and burdens upon the public. In other cases, where individuals have lost or injured their boats or nets, the society has, after due enquiry, afforded such assistance as enabled the sufferer to continue his industrious occupation, and at the same time has shewn in the most striking manner, the value of a good character.

In contemplating the increase of our coast fisheries, we are induced to attach a still greater value to this benevolent institution, as it must hold out great encouragement to the enterprising inhabitants of our maritime counties, from the kind interest which is taken in their behalf. We hope yet to see the day when we shall derive the full benefit of our insular position, and enjoy with gratitude to our Almighty Benefactor, the abundance with which he has so liberally blessed us, by land and sea. A general effort made throughout the country at this period of acknowledged national distress, to promote our fisheries and their produce, would be eminently successful, scarcity would soon give way to abundance, and idleness and profligacy to industrious habits.

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